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## “Divide and conquer”. Anti-racist and community organizing under austerity

Bethan Harries <sup>a</sup>, Bridget Byrne <sup>b</sup>, Lindsey Garratt <sup>c</sup> and  
Andy Smith <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Sociology, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK; <sup>b</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK; <sup>c</sup>School of Childhood, Youth and Education Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK; <sup>d</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK



### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of austerity on anti-racist and community organizing. We focus on three key shifts: changes to public funding, the push to entrepreneurialism and the mainstreaming of Equalities legislation. The paper contributes to critical understandings of the changing relationship between civil society and the state and the challenges this creates for working against racism. We highlight how austerity acts as an alibi to further diminish race as a policy concern. Organizations and activists are encouraged to act as entrepreneurs and confront each other as competitors, rather than allies in a political struggle. This leads to a very real sense that solidarities are being deliberately ruptured in order to “divide and conquer” and diminish collective organizing capacity. We illustrate how this is compounded by the cumulative affective consequences of austerity measures, often at considerable costs in terms of a broader collective agenda.

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**KEYWORDS** Affect; civil society; Equalities; neoliberal; policy; third sector

Austerity measures were introduced in the UK in 2010 ostensibly as a response to the effects of the global financial crisis in 2008. Often used as shorthand to discuss financial cutbacks, austerity encompasses extensive retrenchment of public services, which carries the potential to reshape the future of the welfare state (Farnsworth and Irving 2015) and further embed the entrepreneurial rationality of neoliberalism (Dardot and Laval 2013). Whilst austerity has impacted the community and voluntary sector as a whole, its effects are not uniformly experienced. Smaller organizations and those representing marginalized groups are worst affected (Featherstone

**CONTACT** Bethan Harries  [bethan.harries@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:bethan.harries@ncl.ac.uk)  @bethanyou

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et al. 2012). Small charities have lost more than 40 per cent of funding from local government (Crees et al. 2016) and “BME” organizations are disproportionately disadvantaged (Craig 2011; ROTA 2009). In this paper, we examine the effects of austerity on anti-racist and community organizing by drawing on qualitative interviews with people working in a paid or voluntary capacity in Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester and Newham. In particular, we focus on three key shifts: changes to public funding; the push to entrepreneurialism; and the mainstreaming of Equalities legislation. In developing this analysis, the paper contributes to critical understandings of the changing relationship between civil society and the state, but it also brings attention to the broader challenges this context creates for working against racism and for social justice. Indeed, whilst we examine the effects of austerity on ethnic minority community organizing, we also highlight that in order to fully grasp the impact of cuts we have to place them in a longer policy context (Emejulu and Bassel 2017), and moves toward the “invisibilisation” of race (Craig 2013). This is vital to address given the role this work plays in redressing the impact of local inequalities and challenging normative practices of exclusion. Localized BME youth groups, for example, can open up important spaces for coordinating a collective effort against hegemonic “white standards” and thus sustain challenges to institutional racism (Bowler 2018). And, what might be considered “basic neighbourhood work” is often at the core of community development work that can counter local discriminatory practices and create convivial spaces (Hashagen, Doyle, and Keenan 2018).

### **Public sector retrenchment and the impact on anti-racist organizing**

The voluntary and community sector has undergone significant changes in the last decade. Cuts to public spending have occurred alongside a rhetoric that stresses that an “oversized and over-centralised” public sector is “crowding out” the private sector, and which argues for a local governance system that relies on the community sector to engage with public services (Grimshaw 2013). This in turn, has enforced an agenda that pushes for civil society to become more entrepreneurial in order to make up for those losses. Charting these changes, Aiken (2014) describes how the post-war idea that voluntary organizations would be funded through grants in order to provide “additionality” has given way to a model-based around individual contracts. In short, the voluntary and community sector has been asked to fill gaps in state provision, as they had under New Labour, but also to exemplify the model of “active citizens” by becoming increasingly self-reliant and market-oriented. The government’s vision of civil society thus takes as its model the work of private commercial enterprises, further evidenced by the shift from grant funding to contracts for pre-defined projects and by the introduction of

Community Interest Companies, which are expected to fund themselves from a range of contracts whilst remaining a “benefit to the community”.

These processes have coincided with, and are in many ways entangled with, a changed political construction of the question of “Equalities”. Since the Equality Act in 2010, we have witnessed a mainstreaming of the Equalities agenda. The Act replaced individual protections against racism and other forms of discrimination and, whilst this was said to simplify what were a complex set of legal instruments, there are concerns that this move has resulted in the “dilution” of protections and the loss of resources (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). What this means in practice is that work that specifically seeks to tackle racism (or, indeed, disablism, sexism or homophobia) is discouraged because, although mainstreaming might hint at the potential for an intersectional perspective, differences have instead been incorporated in ways that arguably “do not make any difference” (Bilge 2014, 3).

For BME-led organizing, these shifts have particular implications. The language and proposed practice of “active citizenship” and mainstreaming speaks to the enduring emphases placed on integration and to a particular, politicized concept of what makes a good citizen. Indeed, the idea of imposed self-reliance has much in common with cohesion, integration and other political policies and strategies that target racialized minorities, when they construct “problems” and “solutions” at a local level abstracted from any consideration of enduring forms of structural inequalities. Moreover, each of these agendas perpetuates a moralizing rhetoric that draws on narrow depictions of what community should be. Such depictions frequently fail to recognize how people might define themselves in relation to different communities living in the same place (Harrison 2012) and occlude or deny the value of “organic forms of multiculturalism” (Featherstone et al. 2012). To illustrate the link between the current agenda and previous integration strategies, one need only look at the literature that suggests a relationship to social capital and psychosocial factors as a means to achieve resilient communities (see Harrison (2012) for a discussion on this).

We are concerned with how the push to entrepreneurialism and self-reliance implies a change in the way that social justice is understood but also how this push impacts on the extent to which the work of those on the margins can endure. Harrison (2012) describes the way that active citizenship is employed to imply something positive because it suggests the valuing of individual agency, but it can deepen embedded inequalities when it is incorporated into academic and policy analysis in ways that reinforce narratives and metaphors that “support and reinforce prevailing relations of power” (Harrison 2012, 99). This has particular resonance for anti-racist and community organizing when we consider how inequalities have long been imagined by the privileged as self-inflicted and as something to be resolved by the self (the individual and community “self”) (Levitas 1996). The

concept, therefore, risks deepening constructions of “bad” versus “good” citizens, which is intensified under the moralizing rhetoric that underlies austerity measures. This has happened typically in the form of calls to “toughen-up” (and other chest-beating substitutes) in hard times. For racialized minorities this kind of framing hits doubly hard because it is compounded by the “masculinist race rhetoric” to be *tough* and *hard* on immigration and integration (Nayak 2012) that has intensified in justifications for austerity and more recently amidst Brexit, the migrant crisis and numerous security panics.

The shifts detailed above raise questions for how those who seek to organize in order to challenge inequalities and racism (including state racism) might operate when the terms of engagement have been set in such a way by those in power. In what follows, then, we draw on our analysis of qualitative work with a range of community organizations and activists across four cities in order to better understand the implications of austerity practices and policies on anti-racist work at a local level. In particular, our analysis: (i) emphasizes the affective consequences of austerity regimes on working practices of those within community organization and on their lived experiences; (ii) examines in greater detail the impact of changes to Equalities legislation since 2010 on the ways in which organizations are encouraged to define their work; (iii) considers the cumulative consequences of these shifts, especially on the capacity of organizations to remain focussed on an explicitly anti-racist or race equality agenda.

Our analysis is informed by and contributes to a range of work investigating the ongoing effects of public sector retrenchment and the corresponding promotion of a neoliberal presumptions and priorities within third-sector work. The approach of Dorothy Smith (e.g. 1988; 1990; see also Campbell and Gregor 2008) is a particularly constructive guide here. For Smith, the gendered division between abstract conceptual understanding and the world of daily practices is fundamental to the operation of power in our society. It is, moreover, a distinction which sociological analysis has all too often replicated for itself, granting authority as it does to the abstract analytical claim at the expense of the hard-won, situated expertise of ordinary people in their daily and working lives. Smith’s response, then, is to call for a sociology which begins by paying closer attention to the ways in which the “discourses of ruling” (1990, 4) shape ordinary experience, especially working lives, and which is willing to listen to the experiences of those who undertake the generally hidden labour required to respond to those discourses within real-life contexts, who are required to translate abstract policy frameworks or institutional imperatives into practice. This work of translating the demands of the discourses of power into the messy contexts of real social relations is, Smith reminds us, a fundamental form of labour albeit one that is constantly erased from sight (2003, 64). Her perspective thus helps us refocus sociological attention on the point at which ideological power is made sociologically

real, on the hidden consequences of the imposition of “discourses of ruling” and on the ways in which activists and workers frequently strive to manage those consequences. It is in this spirit that we approach the discussion which follows.

## Research design

For this project we interviewed 86 voluntary and paid workers in activist and community organizing roles across four cities of the UK (Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester and the London Borough of Newham). Many of the organizations we worked with were already pushed to the edge of their resources, especially the smallest groups, which are known to be at greatest risk. All interview participants worked for, or were associates of, organizations that had an anti-racist/race equality agenda in areas including advocacy, education, health and youth services. The majority of these organizations were BME-led, and a minority of the volunteers are White. We refer to the participants throughout as organizers for ease of reference but there are variations within the group. The vast majority of those we spoke to identified as Black or “BME” and worked in small organizations, or were individual activists that were affiliated with several small organizations. All knew the sector in which they were working well but some had been doing this type of activity for considerably longer than others. In addition, many participants lived in the locales in which they were working, which meant they were affected by cuts to their organization in more direct or personal ways. These more specific characteristics are noted in the discussion where they are relevant.

The specific goal of the research we were undertaking was not to explore the impact of austerity as such. We were interested in a broader question about how the nature and practice of community organizing had changed over the last 20–30 years. The four locations were selected in order to capture how these changes manifested in places that have long histories of migration and have been impacted by different layers of governance following devolution at local and national level. Nevertheless, as the following discussion makes apparent, austerity or more specifically “the cuts”, became a key focus in the interviews. No doubt this is influenced by the timing of our interviews, which took place at a moment in which the vast majority of organizations had experienced sudden drops in grant funding and were coming to terms with contract culture. The weight of austerity, and its consequences, thus emerged a significant inductive focus of our analysis which incorporated a range of sub-themes including processes related to understandings of resilience and active citizenship and how these connect to collective solidarities and the struggle against persistent inequalities and racism.

## The costs of being civil: austerity and its accumulative affects

Most of the organizations that were involved in this study had previously relied on some sort of fairly predictable funding stream, typically emanating from the relevant Local Authority. We stress *fairly* predictable since this stream was not always sufficient but did typically allow a certain level of flexibility about how money was spent and gave *some* security to enable planning for the future. When we interviewed them in 2013–14, almost all organizations had seen this funding cut. Organizations were thus in the process of seeking funding from a range of alternative sources.

Before introducing the various stressors faced by organizations in relation to their activities, it is important to situate these experiences within the broader environment in which organizations were working. Typically, the localities in which they are situated are dealing with multiple effects from a combination of austerity measures and recession. Growing unemployment, an increasingly repressive welfare system and a decline in public services have had significant impacts on local populations, including direct impacts on some of the volunteers. These impacts are cumulative. They affect multiple aspects of people's lives over time. Many of the smaller organizations that we spoke to were working from poorly maintained premises, or were in precarious set-ups – one organization supporting Muslim women was evicted from their current premises on the day that we had scheduled an interview. Spaces were also small and often overcrowded. These conditions were experienced as relentless pressures. They made everyday tasks more difficult and made it harder for workers to retain energy and optimism. Beyond the immediate local environment, interviews took place amidst the continuing migrant crisis, and during a reported increase in racist attacks (see Burnett 2017). This is pertinent because these are often the very issues that the people we interviewed are attempting to work against. The structural/funding pressures at an institutional level and the increased experience of threat at an interpersonal level therefore intersect and reinforce each other.

The locales in which these organizations were based had been hit by austerity in a range of ways and these served to both strengthen the resolve of those involved but also stretched the limits of their resources and put extra pressure on low-paid or unpaid workers. In some instances, workers and users of organizations were experiencing increasing austerity-related difficulties associated with lower income, poorer health and unemployment which, as Clayton, Donovan, and Merchant (2015) note, make it harder to engage with people in a consistent way. Austerity measures also produce a larger workload when increasing numbers of people need help and advice with a more complex set of problems. As a result, even organizations that are not “advice” oriented end up filling this gap. This was a picture we witnessed across all four sites: as statutory advice services are cut, pre-existing



volunteer-led services become over-stretched after taking up the slack – follow the queues snaking around the streets before 9am on weekday mornings and you will likely find an “advice centre” at the end of it. Many volunteers had no dedicated skill-base in welfare, housing or immigration advice etc., but found themselves tasked with trying to decipher what was happening with applications, decisions and so on. In Cardiff a woman who worked for an organization that provided a range of social and educational programmes had inadvertently become a key provider of drop-in advice. Before our interview began a young man arrived clutching a plastic bag torn and busting with piles of letters, a look of panic on his face. The volunteer asked if we would mind delaying the interview. She invited the young man in and he started to pace nervously as she took the bag and emptied its contents on a desk already strewn with her own paperwork. She later explained that there had been a recent bereavement in his family, and he was trying to cope with the family’s finances. There was a threat to evict him and his younger siblings, mounting bills, angry letters from welfare advisers, the list went on. Diligently, she picked out the most urgent and began calling numbers on his behalf. The whole process took over half an hour, after which she asked if he could come back tomorrow and she’d continue with the work. She explained that she increasingly had to do this for people even though she felt that she had neither the time nor sufficient knowledge to navigate the complex issues which people faced. This case thus also emphasizes the need to place struggles in the wider context; to take account of the disproportionate impact of austerity on the BME population and of the pernicious effects of the hostile environment which faces migrants with precarious immigration status, and racialized minorities more generally.

Organizations tended to talk about solutions to these stressors in a pragmatic way and consequently, the issue of funding dominated our interviews. Often workers would motion to piles of papers on nearby desks or to specific sections of funding applications as they enunciated the complexities involved. When we arrived to interview X in Cardiff, she was in the middle of writing a funding proposal. She was surrounded by paper and, as she carefully reordered them, she expressed frustration about the section she had been dealing with in the latest “enormous” application instead of doing her “actual job”. The task of applying for renewed support now made up most of her job and was itself comprised of a range of activities: looking for opportunities, developing and submitting applications, repeating this process whilst waiting for outcomes of previous applications, dealing with rejections. She expressed a sense of profound fatigue regarding this relentless circular process. Compounding this, the sense of relief in securing funding was often quickly followed by disappointment. The reliance on one-off discrete projects denies her organization any long-term security or the possibility of making any sustained or lasting impact.

The process of continuously applying for “little pots” of money fed anxieties about the inability to plan ahead, but also the (in)ability to secure resources that are essential to the longer-term running of organizations but which are not easily accounted for in discrete project bids, including basic things such as room hire. Moreover, these processes had deeply affective consequences. Rejections of funding applications were experienced not only as judgments on individual worth but also raised questions about how work with racialized minorities is responded to more broadly. This is an issue picked up on in the discussion that follows, but worth noting here is the feeling of exasperation and futility that volunteers conveyed. The cyclical funding/application process gave workers the sense that they were fighting a losing battle, which was, as we go on to highlight, exacerbated by a feeling that bigger, more established/well-resourced and White-led organizations tend to be more successful. Conflict around funding was a common theme. Volunteers and workers described feeling as if they were pitted against each other, even whilst they were experiencing the same stress and motivated towards similar ends. This added to the sense of being overwhelmed and even disoriented with regards to the “real” battle so to speak.

## **Making sense of the situation**

What characterized attempts by workers to make sense of their situation was often a sense of fatalism regarding financial cutbacks, linked to the recession:

We don't have that overall ability to not only sort of offer support ... all of these kind of things that we could have done back in the early days, if you like, which is a shame. But I suppose recession, etc., you know'. (Glasgow)

We're going to have funding cuts this year with Cardiff Council but we're expecting it – but everybody is, you know. It's something we're all having to face up to. So it's something we're just going to have to adapt [to]. (Cardiff)

The idea that organizations should facilitate the development of “active citizens” can have a seductive appeal when dressed in the guise of empowerment and the extension of democracy (Purcell 2006; Featherstone et al. 2012). But the fatalism evident in many of these interviews really only reflects the way in which austerity measures have been normalized (Cooper and Whyte 2017). This is a context where Dorothy Smith's account of the ways in which powerful political and institutional constructions – what she calls “textual realities” – shape the work of those who are required to deal with the everyday impacts of policy decisions in people's lives, is obviously salient. One important consequence of this process of “ideological organization” is the way in which “austerity” establishes a set of immediate “textual realities” to which community organizations are required to respond on a

daily basis (the management of funding applications, new forms of accountability and so forth), whilst also making it more challenging for those involved to think through the wider or structural context of these changes. We can consider this in more detail by exploring one particular case.

X is a community group that has been running for more than 30 years and had been funded almost entirely by the Local Authority during that period. The group itself was Muslim-led and worked in a locality with a relatively high Muslim population. The remit of the organization had grown over its long tenure and its activities were broad-ranging, including supplementary education, health, housing, immigration, English language teaching, as well as provision for a youth club and support for older people. The organization has been influential in changing a number of local policies on health and is well known locally. Their work was recognized when they won a prize from the Local Authority for best community project. However, just weeks after this award, they were notified that all funding was to be withdrawn. The manager mooted with a shrug that this decision was probably because of “the cuts”. Yet, probed further, there was doubt that things were quite so clear cut. First, the manager’s knowledge that other “bigger” organizations had managed to maintain *some* funding made him suspicious. More generally, we might legitimately question why an award-winning organization had failed where others, less lauded and arguably already better resourced, had not.

We asked the manager if he had received feedback on the rejection. He explained they had but implied that it was vague, and they did not fully understand it. He said they had been told informally that the Council were prioritizing organizations that cover multiple “protected characteristics”. It emerged that, although their organization provided for people of different ages, genders, linguistic groups, nationalities, statuses etc., they were not understood as fulfilling this criterion because they were ultimately perceived as a “minority organisation”. He was reluctant to say more because he feared that talking negatively about this contradiction might further limit their potential to acquire funding in the future. Similar examples were found across all four research sites, suggesting that local authorities and devolved governments are not adopting significantly different approaches. Amongst other things, the conjunction of the awarding of this prize with the withdrawal of funding seems telling. It suggests, at the very least, that the processes of auditing “success” and “failure”, and the constant measuring of “performance” which are such characteristic features of neoliberal funding regimes (and which many of those we spoke to spent huge amounts of time managing) are at best a kind of fiction. If an organization can be, at once, both the “best” and see its funding withdrawn, the essential arbitrariness of the relentless process of quality audit become apparent, and their underlying disciplinary function is easier to recognize.

As noted above, since the 2010 Equality Act there has been a shift in expectations such that organizations are increasingly required to address “multiple

characteristics". Across all four sites it was evident that there is considerable pressure on organizations to shift emphasis away from antiracist work to work that is "rights-focused" and "for all". In Glasgow, one worker explained how the name of their organization had been deliberately changed from one that flagged their antiracist agenda to a more nebulous rights-based label, adding that, "Everybody's got to cover everything now". Crucially, this shift in emphasis impacts on practice. The organization had, over time, stopped doing anti-racist casework because they were unable to obtain funding to pay for a dedicated case-worker. Similar stories are found across the UK where many of the former race equality councils have been rebranded as "regional equality councils". Smaller organizations explained how they had also deliberately removed words including "Race", "Black" and "Muslim" from their titles. The extent to which this was implemented was particularly acute in Newham and Manchester where we were told by civil servants within the Council that the approach is one in which it is understood that "we all have needs" and therefore it would be wrong to prioritize the needs of anyone (or any one "group") over another. We might question why case law set by Southall Black Sisters' judicial review against Ealing Council<sup>1</sup> has not been applied to such situations. The answer perhaps is complex. Organizations tend not to have sufficient resources to challenge decision-making and changing names and pitching their work in specific ways is often an attempt to prevent them being penalized in the first place. Second, when decisions are made, they are often relayed in ways that are sufficiently ambiguous to make any case against them difficult. Third, decisions regarding funding and support are now often couched in a market-based logic that emphasizes which projects "add" the most "value". We discuss the latter in more detail below. Crucial to note here is the way in which organizations feel pressured to alter their work, or at least the appearance of their work. It was thus common to find programmes of, for example, "cultural work", being used as a cover for race equality or anti-racist interventions. Whilst this is performed as a survival strategy it nevertheless risks leading to a further diminution of race as a factor to be addressed in social policy.

The relationships that organizations have with funding bodies often point to a broader problem. There is still the sense, as Tilki et al. (2015) argue, that when BME community organizations are called upon it is in tokenistic ways in order to fulfil political mandates. This was interpreted as further evidence that the state was not committed to working against inequalities in a holistic or sustained way:

They like to have us. Sometimes I think they like to have us because there can be a bit of a tick box kind of element to it, which we try and resist but we're aware of ... And I mean there's always the danger of tokenism as well; you know, which again you've got to be kind of aware of and that kind of thing – sometimes you don't want to be *used*, you know. So there's things you have to kind of keep an eye on.

Related to this, there was also a feeling that each time a funding call came out the parameters would shift or there was little indication as to what the funders “really” wanted. Knowing where to place the emphasis in applications meant keeping abreast of the way in which local and national policy agendas might influence these funding priorities. For example, one worker said sardonically, “value for money was the big thing in 2012”. These shifts in demand and the lack of transparency that surrounds them were experienced as an incredibly maddening process. At the same time, although such an interpretation would be hard to prove, the sheer arbitrariness of funding criteria and their constant shifting are suggestive of a regime that is more concerned with the maintenance of strategic control over the activities of locally-based organizations than it is with a meaningful challenge to existing inequalities.

Moreover, the need to keep up with these fairly frequent shifts in emphases favours those organizations that have closer relationships with the political sphere. This typically meant those organizations that were bigger, already well-resourced and often White-led. The desperation of smaller BME organizations trying to understand all of these changes was palpable. One worker asked off-tape with some urgency and with considerable emotion if there was a possibility that we (White academics with more power) could find out what had *really* “gone on” with their recent application after they had lost all of their funding. What really “goes on” with funding applications is certainly not a question that can be easily answered. In part, this is because the parameters shift so much and because there is little transparency about funding processes themselves but it is also because austerity acts to conceal and reinforce other penalties on vulnerable groups.

## Competition and loss of global connections

In this final section we draw attention to the bigger picture and consider the damage being done to collective organizing by the processes described above and epitomized here:

So you’re fighting that [process] and keeping yourself going rather than doing the work you should be doing (laughs). And you’re spending your money developing all these things, the little bit of money you actually get, rather than doing anything else.

At a community centre in Manchester, which acted as a social centre for new migrants and a soup kitchen, volunteers had begun to offer support with job applications and CV writing in response to the rise in unemployment, recently exacerbated by the closure of two key local employers. This activity was driven by local need, and was not funded, but relied on additional volunteer-time and low-cost room hire from a local faith centre. Soon after starting they discovered that the local job centre had begun referring people to them,

stretching their capacity to near breaking point. New attendees made use of the support service but also discovered the soup kitchen, which was their most expensive output. This led to ethical quandaries as volunteers felt simultaneously pleased that more people could access help but growing anxiety about how any of it could continue. Beyond the immediate question of how to deal with rising numbers of participants there was anger. These “referrals” created bad-feeling and increased resentment that a public institution would rely on free labour to fill gaps in their services. This again was not an isolated incident as public sector services have come to be over-stretched themselves. Running alongside the formal growth of processes of subcontractation to private organizations there is this secondary, frequently invisible, always informal and often entirely un-funded process of subcontractation, by which volunteer organizations are left to fill gaping holes that austerity has left in lives of local communities.

We discovered that the organization described above was regarded with suspicion by some other local groups precisely because they had inadvertently become a referral centre for statutory services. This led to a misconception that they were getting favoured treatment when they were struggling to survive. This misinterpretation is illustrative of a wider point, and it was common for workers to discuss the ways in which changes to funding mechanisms had the effect of generating a highly competitive environment.

One of the difficult issues that we’ve got at the moment is obviously that competition for funding is incredibly fierce and so it’s a very competitive, quite cutthroat atmosphere out there at the moment. So I think that’s probably one of the main issues in terms of relationships with other organisations is that we’re all competing for the same pots of funding, which makes it quite hard to maintain good, positive working relationships sometimes. You know, it’s not nice ... I do, you know, think that’s been very damaging and you can quote me on that because I think it’s harmful to the sector because it means that it doesn’t provide much incentive to organisations to work together, you know. (Cardiff)

The rhetoric of active citizenship emphasizes the role of “community” but, in practice, it disrupts the idea that communities provide spaces of conviviality by constructing new boundaries and new spheres of limited self-interest. In this respect, we might do well to reflect on the contradiction between the convivial nature of the locales in which many of these organizations operated, and the intense competition that these changes fostered. Evidence of competition can be misused to construct the illusion of friction, even where there is none or to exaggerate the potential for conflict. Hence, incidents of urban unrest are frequently attributed to local competition over resources between distinct “ethnic groups” rather than systemic disadvantage. Reflecting on this, one activist in Cardiff described how these mechanisms, controlled by the state and local authorities, created a “divide and conquer” strategy

through which policy was implemented in ways that deliberately ruptured solidarities and sustained the image of “communities” in disarray.

In itself, a situation in which organizations fight over limited resources is not new and whilst representatives from some organizations emphasized “new” aspects of this competitive environment, older activists often put this situation in a longer historical context. What becomes a common thread, is the sense that funding was never really intended to allow for any impact on black people’s lives but rather to maintain the status quo and simultaneously quieten dissent (Young 1990). Funding was described by these older activists as having always been “tokenistic” and intended to “sedate” and distract and, as one activist in Cardiff put it, to cause “misdirection and infighting over bits of the pie”. Austerity was thus perceived as merely a reshaping of this control.

What perhaps is new in the current conjuncture is that, within this pre-existing frame, organizations are being persuaded to adapt themselves to business models particularly in the form of Community Interest Companies (CIC) in order to become “resilient”. Here, an adviser to voluntary groups in Cardiff talked with excitement about how many people she has advised and helped set up their own social enterprise, using the new CIC model. In doing so she actively encourages competition as a means to “improve” community organizing:

(Laughs) I’d say there’s a certain amount of competition. It gets a little bit like; well, if they’ve done that, why can’t we? Which is something I tend to applaud. You know, yes you can, let’s get started on looking at that. In terms of some groups getting more than others and resentment, yes, but actually it’s very much a periphery feeling.

The danger of this “business model” of community work, however, is that it not only depoliticizes the work itself but that it sets up a competitive dynamic which promotes the co-opting of the needs of marginalized groups. This is a problem exemplified in the following comments from workers in Glasgow and Cardiff where there are relatively high proportions of Roma and Somalis respectively:

It’s almost like funding has kind of followed the Roma people but the Roma people wouldn’t know there is any funding there.

The Somali community is the most deprived one. There are 50 or so organisations who say in inverted commas, they help the Somalis of the community, they help themselves with employment really.

There is more at stake here than the establishment of a dynamic which converts vulnerable groups to a form of symbolic capital. The same advice worker goes on to explain how, once set up, CICs must market themselves to funders

in ways that are synonymous with “mainstreaming” that has been (mis)interpreted from the Equality Act:

They (funders) want to know who’s going to be your beneficiaries ... is it one generic type, are you bringing people together? ... they don’t want anybody to be operating in isolation. So they are looking for how can – what’s the value added here? If you’re holding an event can this group and this group come along and contribute, and by doing that actually increase community resilience, community understanding and community cohesion.

Officially, therefore, it is not that funding is declined because particular organizations are deemed to be “single issue”. Such a judgement could be contested, as is evident from the Southall Black Sisters’ case. Instead, decisions are said to be indicative of a competitive marketplace which efficiently rewards those who can offer the most “value-added”. Market-based mechanisms thus work as a kind of alibi in a process which has tended to undermine the work of BME organizations. It is not only the idea that activities should be considered in terms of their added value that is contrary to the approach of many of those that we spoke to. There are particular issues raised by the implication that “value” can only be added if an organization gives up on the idea of representing or speaking on behalf of a particular community. This would suggest a need to move away from activities that support group mobilization towards individualized action. This highlights a problem for political activities in this field. For example, a “community” centre becomes reinterpreted solely in cultural terms, rather than as unique spaces galvanized around social justice for people who are excluded elsewhere. Indeed, organizations sometimes frame activities this way in order to stand a greater chance of receiving funding even at the risk of depoliticizing inequalities and entrenching the idea that race can or should be ignored.

The central point here is that competitive culture is not conducive to addressing social need. It also puts minority-led organizations at a disadvantage. This is not only because larger, often White-led, organizations have more resources and more expertise to deal with funding proposals (Featherstone et al. 2012; Milbourne 2009; Taylor 2006), although this is true. It is often also true that those larger organizations have limited capacity to deliver the projects they propose and are not well-embedded in communities (Clayton, Donovan, and Merchant 2015). But a supplementary point is that the demand to demonstrate “impact” by acquiring testimonials from key players as part of applications favours larger organizations because they are more likely to have existing relations with the “right” people. The cumulative effect on minority-led organizations is that they can fold under pressure or risk surrendering their autonomy, becoming tokenistic partners, or add-ons to bigger projects (Taylor 2003). Furthermore, it is often locally based organizations that are often not consulted at all on policies that will impact them in any meaningful way.



This is the beauty of [consultations], they'll ask everybody ... But when it goes back into oof!!! [claps]. The answer is already there ... And they'll tick the box to say we've consulted widely on this wonderful policy we've got (laughs).

Government policy thus appears to legitimate the neglect of ethnic minority disadvantage and works in such a way as to intensify competitive power dynamics within the voluntary sector, especially amongst organizations committed to tackling inequalities. It is the cumulative effects of these power dynamics and the anxiety that emerges from the associated pressures that emerged most prominently from our research.

Shifts in institutional arrangements and funding mechanisms encourage competition in new ways, and the force of pre-existing liberal and communitarian understandings of "ethnic community" potentially allows for this dynamic to have the effect of intensifying a focus on cultural and local origins. As such these shifts reflect neoliberalism's willingness to endorse and run alongside a certain kind of identity politics (Bilge 2014). These new arrangements repeatedly reinforce this by encouraging organizations to talk in very general terms about what they do and the issues they want to address in order to develop an attractive business model. This becomes particularly apparent in the process of applying for and distributing funds. As we have shown, these processes encourage tension and competition between local organizations but the conceptual effects are also palpable more broadly among people living in local areas. The consequences are such that people are required to assert their concerns in narrowed ways, which are somewhat disconnected from others, but are also disconnected from more global concerns and the broader politics of racism and inequalities. It is important to note that these issues are not lost on activists and organizations. In practice, they face huge dilemmas about whether they should attempt to "game" the system in order to obtain funding, but it is often a question of whether, as one volunteer put it, "you can stomach it".

## Conclusion

This paper has illustrated how austerity can act as an alibi for what are a series of revived practices that manage and undermine the most marginalized, and, contributes to the further diminution of race as a policy concern. It highlights how organizations and activists are encouraged to act as entrepreneurs and confront each other as competitors, rather than allies in a political struggle. This leads to a very real sense that solidarities are being deliberately ruptured in order to "divide and conquer" and thus diminish collective organizing capacity. We have discussed how this is compounded by the cumulative affective consequences of austerity measures, when the need to deal with funding processes and related forms of auditing become a core focus of

attention for anti-racist organizations, often at considerable costs in terms of their broader agenda.

Organizations have been pushed toward marketization and encouraged to become “active citizens” without state support or recognition of the real value of anti-racist work. Market-based logics have thus provided the “rhetorical cover” for major cuts in public spending (Corbett and Walker 2012) but have also been employed as a convenient excuse to undermine anti-racist organizing and silence the voice that organizations give to the effects of stark inequalities and enduring racism. The definition of marginalized communities as both cause and prospective solution of social “problems” is politically expedient because it relieves powerful institutions and a wider public of complicity in producing exclusions whilst at the same time appearing to *do* something – and something that does not cost much by way of resources (Milbourne 2009). It is important but also timely to reflect on these issues when Brexit, which entrenches many of the nostalgia-led pleas to sovereignty and self-reliance, will potentially lead to future cuts in public spending with greater risks for racialized minorities and those organizing against racism. Indeed, it is vital that we note how austerity plays off the kind of “blitz-spirit” “bootstrap-pulling” characterizations of Britishness, which are mobilized even more efficiently in periods of economic instability and which foreshadowed the mood of the Brexit referendum. The contradiction implied in the relationship between the “all” (in-it-together) and the “self” in “self-inflicted” and “self-reliant” should alert us to that inclusionary/ exclusionary dynamic. These are boundaries which are already deeply entrenched. It is this kind of ambiguous relationship that is illustrated in naïve defences of immigration that emphasize hard-working contributions of individual migrant groups, rather than a broader sense of social responsibility. It is a similar, and not unconnected, stigma that constructs welfare recipients as the “undeserving poor” to justify state intervention (Tyler 2013).

Encouraged by work that calls for closer attention to be paid to the way in which the “discourses of ruling” (Smith 1990) shape ordinary experience, this discussion has provided evidence from which we can understand how organizations make sense of austerity and struggle to continue working towards their main aims. In doing so it illustrates how the remit of organizations and their connections to each other risks becoming somewhat lost under the relentless pressures austerity produces. This is further exacerbated when problems, deriving from long-standing inequalities, are recoded within policy agendas through the lens of culture rather than race, or as issues that affect everyone equally. These policy shifts represent crude attempts to depoliticize work on race and risk co-opting the needs of marginalized groups to serve others’ purposes. This process of recoding has significant repercussions for how organizations can operate when seeking funding or trying to communicate the importance of what they do within the broader public and policy

sphere. Among organizations there is concern that, working within this climate and amidst the unrelenting stress that they are under, there is a risk of dissonance and extended diversions from their core aims as they battle to get their agenda heard.

## Note

1. In 2008, Southall Black Sisters won a case against Ealing Council at Judicial Review. The Council's decision to withdraw funding from organisations that only targeted "specific groups" was subsequently overruled.

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## ORCID

Bethan Harries  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1668-8391>

Bridget Byrne  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3519-4709>

Lindsey Garratt  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3775-0695>

Andy Smith  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1514-8553>

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